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ABSTRACT

Educational preparation of remedial reading teachers is often inadequate and ccnfusing tc the student due to the limited acquaintance with a variety of methods and techniques, failure of teachers to define their terms, and the limited number of actual reading courses offered students. In order to remedy this situatich, the Remedial Reading Program at Oregon State University emphasizes cne approach to teaching and evaluation methods in preparing remedial reading teachers at the Master's level. Emphasis is given to the development cf a basic foundation grcup of transferable skills, techniques, and ccncepts of reading. The use of the Informal Reading Inventory as the basic diagnostic and evaluative instrument; the directed reading lesscn, which can be applied to almost any learning activity; and the Fernald-Keller technique for pupils with word-learning prcblems are taught. Students are required to complete 18 quarter hours of reading courses, 9 hours of which are clinical practicum. References are included. (DH)

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ONE VIEWPOINT ON PREPARING TEACHERS OF REMEDIAL READING

The thesis of this paper is that emphasis on one approach in methods of teaching and evaluation in preparing teachers of remedial reading at the Master's level is preferable to that of teaching students a number of methods.

Background

Professionals in the area of reading, in attempting to improve their own teaching, are constantly questioning their approaches and those of their colleagues in preparing teachers of reading. At times, the discussions confuse students and teachers because the discussants fail to define their terms. It, therefore, appears prudent and necessary to:

(1) define the term remedial reader as we use it

(2) determine what teachers of reading, administrators, parents, and pupils with reading problems expect of a remedial reading specialist

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(3) indicate the kinds of educational preparation that will adequately prepare the remedial reading specialist to meet the demands of all persons involved with remedial readers.

Remedial Reader Defined

In this paper, a remedial reader is defined as one who is so severely retarded in reading that he is unable to achieve successfully in other academic areas in which reading is required for learning. A remedial reader has neurological and/or psychological problems in addition to the same kinds of problems that afflict the retarded or corrective reader. He, therefore, requires the individualized help of a reading specialist or teacher.

Kress(5) notes that a remedial reader has an associative learning problem. He cannot associate the printed symbol with meaning from his own experiental background because he is unable to pronounce the written word. He cannot recognize, for example, a word such as house even though he has seen it and pronounced it with a teacher's help only seconds ago. Kress further states that the remedial reader's primary problem is nearly always one of learning to recognize words, and most authorities will agree on this point.

What is Expected of a Remedial Reading Specialist?

Succinctly stated, administrators, teachers, parents, and the children who are remedial readers, expect, and rightfully so, that the remedial reading specialist will teach the child how to read. They are not concerned with the causal factors contributing to the child's problem nor the development of specific reading skills necessary for him to read at his own potential. They simply want the child to learn to read.

Those who prepare the remedial reading specialist expect him to be sufficiently competent to:

(1) diagnose with reasonable accuracy the child's strengths and weaknesses in reading

(2) obtain information about the child's reading potential

(3) have some valid idea of his intelligence

(4) provide individualized instruction that will help the child to successfully develop specific reading skills

(5) help the child to be aware of his own instructional needs and goals

(6) provide interesting materials that will challenge the child's learning abilities but not overwhelm him in the process.

The remedial reading specialist, however, cannot be concerned solely with remediation. He must be vitally concerned with the prevention of severe reading problems among all children. There is little he can do to prevent neurological difficulties or brain damage that is already present. He can, however, prevent psychological problems associated with reading failure in numerous ways. He can, for example:

(1) diagnose children for classroom teachers

(2) help teachers develop reading lessons at children's instructional levels of learning instead of frustrating many of them by trying to teach all of them at the same level

(3) demonstrate how to teach children at various levels of reading

(4) demonstrate how to teach various reading skills needed by individual children or groups of children.

Preparation of Remedial Reading Specialists

The preceding minimal list of what is expected of a remedial reading specialist is sufficiently complex as it stands, but is only an indicator of some of the major concerns of the remedial reading specialist. Is it any wonder that those who prepare these specialists are concerned with the educational programs they follow?

Most institutions of higher education that grant a Master's degree in Remedial Reading meet the Minimum Standards of Professional Training of Reading Specialists developed and published by the International Reading Association. Some exceed the suggested minimal standards.

It is interesting to compare the limited number of actual reading courses that are offered by most degree granting institutions with their offering of supporting courses such as, measurement and/or evaluation, psychology, adolescent and/or child psychology, the exceptional child, the maladjusted child, the mentally retarded child, linguistics, individualized intelligence testing, guidance, speech and hearing.

The Remedial Reading program at Oregon State University is similar to a majority of programs at other universities and colleges, according to the courses listed in their catalogues. The actual number of required reading courses at the Master's level at Oregon State University for preparing remedial reading specialists is 18 quarter hours. Because of the limited number of instructional reading hours, two questions are pertinent: "What kinds of courses in evaluation and teaching techniques should have priority?" and "Is it better to teach a limited number of concepts and skills in depth or try to cover a greater number of concepts, methods, and techniques?"

The program finally decided upon consists of the following reading courses, (1) The Psychology of Reading, (2) Diagnostic Techniques, (3) Remedial Reading Procedures, and (4) three quarters of Clinical Practicum, one quarter of the three being spent in supervised work in the public schools. In these courses, emphasis is given to developing a basic foundation group of transferable skills, techniques, and concepts of reading in the three areas of (1) evaluation and diagnosis, (2) a directed reading lesson, and (3) an adaptation of the Fernald-Keller technique (2).

The Informal Reading Inventory

The Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) is the basic evaluative and diagnostic instrument. Students, however, do have instruction, assigned reading and projects in working with various standardized tests of reading, the telebinocular and the reading eye.

The IRI, originally developed by Dr. Betts (1), is, in the writer's opinion, the best diagnostic instrument available. It has its critics, and sometimes rightfully so, but the criticisms deal primarily with minor technicalities and not the principles upon which the IRI is based. Betts has stated many times that the greatest strength and weaknesses of the IRI is the competency of the user of it.

The IRI makes it possible for the examiner to obtain insights into the extremely complex thinking processes called reading that would otherwise remain undiscovered.

One of the recognized major values of the IRI is that it makes it possible for the teacher to determine the level at which a pupil can read successfully and to provide him with adequate materials at this level.

In the course of determining a pupil's reading levels, numerous specific problems are uncovered. Phonic weaknesses, for example, can be spotted immediately. There is no guesswork about a child being able or unable to pronounce words beginning with "str" blends, or to recognize the "oi" diphthong. Nor is there any question about his ability to use context clues, read for meaning, associate meaning with certain vocabulary words, or benefit from silent reading before rereading orally. He is evaluated in a functional reading situation that is almost identical to his reading as he normally uses it.

But the IRI yields other pertinent information to those who know how to use it. The alert examiner may observe symptons of visual, hearing, speech, and other physical problems that might be overlooked in a regular classroom.

Indications of the depth and variety of a child's thinking are revealed by his answers to questions. Some indication of his personality is revealed by the way in which he works in answering a question or trying to pronounce an unknown word Does he quit immediately if he is unsure of his answer or pronunciation, or does he say, "Let me get it. Let me get it."

One could give numerous other specific examples of data that can be obtained by using an IRI, but these few samples should be indicative of the value of this instrument.

One of the major values of the IRI that has received but scant attention is its tremendous value in helping teachers and prospective teachers to better understand the reading behavior of pupils; to note how a child reacts when he finally achieves a goal successfully, or how he reacts to

failure and frustration. The writer finds it to be an outstanding teaching-learning instrument for his students. Those who prefer to read more about the IRI might start with reading Betts (1), Johnson & Kress (4,5) and Marksheffel (6).

A Directed Reading Lesson

There are several valid reasons for emphasizing the use of a directed reading lesson:

(1) The general principles upon which it is based are educationally and psychologically sound and can be applied to almost any kind of learning activity, especially those in which written materials are used, provided the user understands it completely. What learning activity does not include some kind of readiness, purpose, use of specific vocabulary, comprehension checks, review, and enrichment or refinement of learned skills?

(2) When the general pattern of a DRL is followed, it has tremendous potential for developing critical reading skills, and critical thinking.

(3) Properly used, it is an excellent evaluation instrument as well as a teaching device. With several minor exceptions, it serves the purpose of and is similar to an informal reading inventory. While using it, the knowledgeable teacher continuously evaluates and diagnoses both the effectiveness of his teaching and the development of learning skills of each individual. And this is what all teachers are trying

to do regardless of their materials, methods, and techniques, isn't it?

The Fernald-Keller Technique

The Fernald-Keller technique, often called VAKT, was developed and used by Grace Fernald, with the help of Helen Keller, in California in the early 1920's (2). It is not a panacea for all word-learning problems and should never be used indiscriminately with all pupils. Most, but not all, remedial readers when using the technique can learn to recognize words that they were previously unable to learn.

It was briefly noted previously that the remedial reader has a problem of being unable to learn words with the usual visual-auditory approach as do the more fortunate pupils. He must have the additional help of the kinesthetic and tactile modes for learning words.

A competent remedial reading specialist can teach needed phonetic skills, syllabication, the transfer of learned syllables to unknown words, and structural clues to a remedial reader as he uses this method.

Summary

Because it is impossible to teach even the most apt learner at the Master's level all he needs to know aboutthe reading processes, it appears to be a sound approach to teach the remedial reading specialist a basic foundation group of transferable skills, techniques, and concepts of reading that will prepare him to continue to learn and develop on his own ~~on his own~~.

It is not the interest of this paper to imply that the suggested program of preparing remedial reading specialists is the answer to better preparation of remedial reading teachers. It is hoped that the point of view taken will raise questions, and that some of them will provide further insight and understanding in helping all children to become better readers.

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